

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION  
(ESRF)**

**REPORT ON A PUBLIC LECTURE BY MR. STEN RYLANDER ON SWEDISH  
POLICY TOWARDS AFRICA FOR THE 21ST CENTURY HELD AT THE ESRF  
CONFERENCE HALL ON MAY 14, 1998**

## **PUBLIC LECTURE ON SWEDISH POLICY TOWARDS AFRICA FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

On May 14, 1998, the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) organized a public lecture on "Swedish Policy Towards Africa for The 21st Century". The lecture, which focused on the New Partnership Challenges for Africa, was delivered by Mr. Sten Rylander, the Assistant Director General and Head of the Africa Department of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Mr. Rylander's service in Africa include having been an ambassador of Sweden to Namibia and Angola.

The event which was chaired by Professor Samuel Wangwe the Executive Director of the ESRF, was attended by members of the public and private sector, representatives of the donor agencies, diplomatic corps and members of the public. Mr. Charles Mutalemwa, the Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Planning Commission was the discussant.

In his presentation, Mr. Rylander intimated that Sweden is evolving a new development policy for Africa given the globalization trends. Such policy places emphasis on cooperation between Sweden and Africa based on equality and the furtherance of the interests of both sides. This policy seeks to do away with the donor-recipient attitude.

The need for supporting the development of the developing countries, and particularly Africa, is central to the new policy. Assistance is aimed at enabling African countries to realize their economic and political potentials in improving the living standards of their people while at the same time opening up to the outside world.

It is time African countries started to reject conditionalities or development prescriptions that do not address their development needs and take their destiny in their own hands. This is all the more important now failure of earlier programs could partly be attributed to their having been wrong founded by failing to reflect African needs.

Mr. Rylander further noted that it is imperative for African leaders to insist on their right to formulate programs of their choice, focusing on attaining growth or raising the standard of living of their people. African leaders should emulate Eritrea's and Uganda's leadership in setting conditions for programs and projects through rejecting prescriptions for development from donors. This is a necessary prerequisite for attaining sustainable development. Globalization trends sweeping through Africa call for designing new approaches so as to meet Africa's needs.

The new policy goes beyond the needs of the African governments but also matters such as the promotion of trade and investment in an effort to utilize the existing potential of many African markets. Trade barriers on goods from Africa in the global market have had a hand in limiting Africa's economic growth must also be addressed. The new policy which is a new generation of genuine partnership is intended to help create greater transparency in all dealings. It will further enable the public to have control on the entire development process which will in turn help in changing life opportunities of the poor.

On this score the participants observed that there is need to understand how Africa should tackle the impact of increasing globalization of trade and financial systems as presently, most of the sub-Saharan African countries have not benefited from globalization i.e. they have been marginalized. The process has however brought a lot of benefits to mostly the developed countries. In the same context it is critically important for development efforts targeting Africa to create a conducive domestic environment to be fully supported by a favorable global/external environment thus allowing for the strengthening and sustenance of the development process in the African countries. A supportive external environment would entail the tackling of several interrelated issues including the improvement of terms of trade of African exports as well as increased commodity earnings. Another area is the expansion of market access opportunities and the diversification of trade for both traditional and non-traditional exports of African countries through safeguards and enhanced modalities for fully utilizing trade preferences available to the countries.

It was further observed that there are new areas such as the issues under the World Trade Organization (WTO) arrangements and the establishment of the new currency system in the European Union that need to be addressed. These are areas where it is essential for African countries to build capacities and launch relevant measures to safeguard and promote their development interests.

The participants further observed that it is essential that programs intended to promote sustainable development (in its broad areas of social development, sustained economic development and economic growth) in Africa be strengthened and should receive adequate support by the concerned development partners. One of the guiding principles should be that cooperation and support in this field like in others should avoid development conditionalities.

Mr. Rylander also observed that realizing the essence of peace and stability for meaningful development, the new policy also gears at fully supporting international efforts to strengthen capacities by African countries to prevent and manage conflicts in their respective regions.

One area that the policy also seeks to address is the colossal external debt burden on Africa which is a result of poor aid coordination on the part of the international development partners. There is need to campaign for debt relief while at the same time supporting moves for more bilateral and multilateral support for economic reforms aimed at realizing economic and social growth in Africa.

The participants expressed the urgent need for evaluation of aid so far received by African countries to determine its effectiveness. Genuine partnership with African countries should begin with the scrapping off of the huge debt. Aid should be replaced by investment. Furthermore, the participants observed, the international development partners should check aid flight as almost 80% of the supposed aid has found its way back to the donor countries.

Other areas earmarked for Swedish support, Mr. Rylander noted, include primary and higher education as well as research activities as partnership can only be practical by first developing the skills and institutions of the weaker partner.

The participants were of the view that over and above educational development, emphasis should be put on the acceleration of technological development programs of the African countries with the adequate support of the bilateral and multilateral sources, including the relevant organs of the United Nations Organization (UN). Such a move, it was observed, would lead to a reduction of the current technological gap between Africa and the rest of the world while at the same time allowing for an increase in the globalization benefits of the technology process. Key emphasis should be placed on the urgent promotion of "electronic commerce" programs in Africa.

New contractual standards that will focus on the critical factors for success must be emphasized. This is important as a means to avoid backtracking by either partner a fact that has contributed to failure of most programs in the past. International development partners should put in place coherent development policies for African countries. On this ground, the discussant, Mr. Mutalemwa noted that there is need for the international development partners to have uniform assistance strategies for developing countries. The present chaotic situation can largely be attributed to lack of uniformity which has in turn made it difficult for the recipients of aid to conform to all requirements prescribed by each donor and implement them efficiently.

Mr. Rylander proceeded to note that African governments should invite the participation of their respective communities including the civil societies, non-government organizations and the private sector in decision-making on the kind of development partnership aid should partake of instead of entrusting only a

few people to negotiate for the nation. New partnership should be people-centred and the people should rightly bear responsibility for failure of programs.

Women should also be empowered as a way of poverty eradication in Africa. They should have access to a share of the resources, land rights and credit facilities as investment in women is widely believed to be a key to development many African countries.

Dialogue, the participants noted, should be continued in order to further articulate and increase the momentum of implementing key or emerging themes in development cooperation. These include, to name a few areas, those that have been the subject of the United Nations Conference follow-up programs e.g. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD IX), Women and Development; Human Settlements; HIV/AIDS; Environment and Development and, Least Developed Countries Program as well as programs aimed at promoting South-South Cooperation including trade, finance, industry and other sectors of development.